

497. Greek tragedies and notions of seemliness.
 We think it
 unseemly to criticise the ways of Divine Providence,
 and we refrain
 from it, whatever we may think. Since
 Christianity is no longer
 imposed by pains and penalties, we think it
 unseemly to assail
 Christianity in the interest of a negative or
 destructive philosophy.
 The Greeks of the fifth century B.C. had not these
 notions. They
 upbraided the gods for their ways to men and for
 their vices.
 The antagonisms of the mores were antagonisms of
 gods. In the
E^tmen^des the most tragic consequences follow
 from the antag-
 onism of the mores of the mother and father family.
 The Furies
 do not insist on the duty of Orestes to kill his
 mother, in blood
 revenge for the murder of his father, because they
 belong to the
 old system, in which the son was of the mother's
 blood; but
 Apollo, the god of the new system, orders it. A
 new doctrine of
 procreation has to be promulgated. " The mother
 does not pro-
 create the son ; she only bears and cherishes the
 awakened life/'
 [Here we see how the doctrines are invented
 afterwards to fit
 the exigencies of new folkways.] Orestes obeys
 Apollo and is a
 victim. Since the command conies from a god,
 how shall the
 man not obey ? To us it is a simple case of a
 common tragedy,
 that an individual is the victim of a great social
 movement. In
 the *Herakleidce*, Alcmena urges that a war captive
 be slain. The
 king of Athens forbids that any one be slain who was
 taken alive.
 The former prevailed. The Athenian doctrine was
 new and high
 and not yet current. In the *Ion* Ion tells Zeus
 and Poseidon
 that if they paid the penalties of all their
 adulteries they would
 empty their temple treasuries. They act wrongly
 when they do
 not observe due measure in their pursuit of

pleasure. It is not
fair to call men wicked when they imitate the gods.
Let the evil
examples be blamed. In the *Andromache* horror is
expressed of
the folkways of the barbarians, in which incest is
not prevented.
In the *Medea* Jason, who is a scoundrel and a
cur, prates to
Medea about her gain in coming to Greece: "Thou
hast learned
what justice means, and how to live by law, not by
the dictates
of brute force." She had not learned it at all —
quite the contrary.
In the *Hekuba* it is said to be a disgrace to
murder guests in
Greece, and in *Iphigenia amongst the Taurians* the
same doctrine